

It is strange, indeed, that the Greeks,
 whose vivid fancy
 could bestow a maiden's beauty and a
 broken heart even
 on the empty voice of Echo, imagined no
 such gracious
 embodiment for Silence; which played a
 part indeed
 in their religion, but never gained there a
 personality.

It was enjoined at their sacrifices, lest a
 word of ill-omen
 should fall from some heedless tongue; it
 was the attribute
 of deities; but it was never a deity itself. To
 Pan belonged
 that 'panic' stillness which lurks among
 the mountains
 of Greece and Sicily through the hushed
 hours that follow
 noon; when every leaf hangs motionless
 and beasts lie
 low for fear of waking the drowsy Goat-god
 in his anger,
 while the uneasy traveller hears his own
 heart beating in
 the quiet of the hills. And again, one of
 those sudden
 pauses in the talk of a whole gathering,
 which our
 grandmothers used to attribute to 'angels'
 wings', would
 move a Greek to say: 'Hermes is come into
 the room.'

Similarly, even amid the innumerable
 divinities of
 ancient Rome, Silence still remained an
 Unknown Goddess.
 Vaticanus they knew, the god of the
 child's first
 cry; and Fabulinus, who watched over its
 first articulate
 word; and shapes more shadowy still, like
 Aius Locutius,
 the Voice that spoke once in the darkness,
 with one vain
 warning of the coming of the Gauls: but for
 that august
 power whose finger is laid for ever on her
 lips, no place

was left in their crowded pantheon, and no
prayer called
on her who had never uttered word.

Yet if silence had no divinity for the
Ancients, they
set it high indeed as a virtue. The cult
which no priest
offered, was paid with endless reiteration by
sage, philo-
sopher, and poet. Indeed, from the fervour
with which
the Greeks praised silence, it is clear how
little they
practised it. The commodity must have been
so precious
because so rare* Hence that rather naive
admiration of